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ABSTRACT

The Culebra Road GED/JOBS (General Educational Development/Job Opportunities and Basic Skills) class provides recipients of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) with remedial academic instruction, job preparedness training, and training in parenting skills. At the suggestion of one of its students, the class undertook a project that involved visiting middle schools and discussing the personal and economic consequences of dropping out of school. The class spent 2 months developing their presentation, which included a short question and answer session, a budget game designed to illustrate the difficulty of living on minimum wage and/or TANF benefits, and the GED/JOBS students' personal stories. The project experienced a temporary setback when the participants were informed that they could not use the word "pregnant" in their presentations. After a compromise allowing them to mention their own pregnancies in their personal stories, 9 of the 16 GED/JOBS students shared their stories with 70 middle school students. The project was considered valuable by the middle school students and their counselor as well as by the GED/JOB students and their instructor. (The following items are included: the middle school counselor's and GED/JOBS instructor's reflections on the project, student handouts, and the GED/JOBS students' stories.) (MN)

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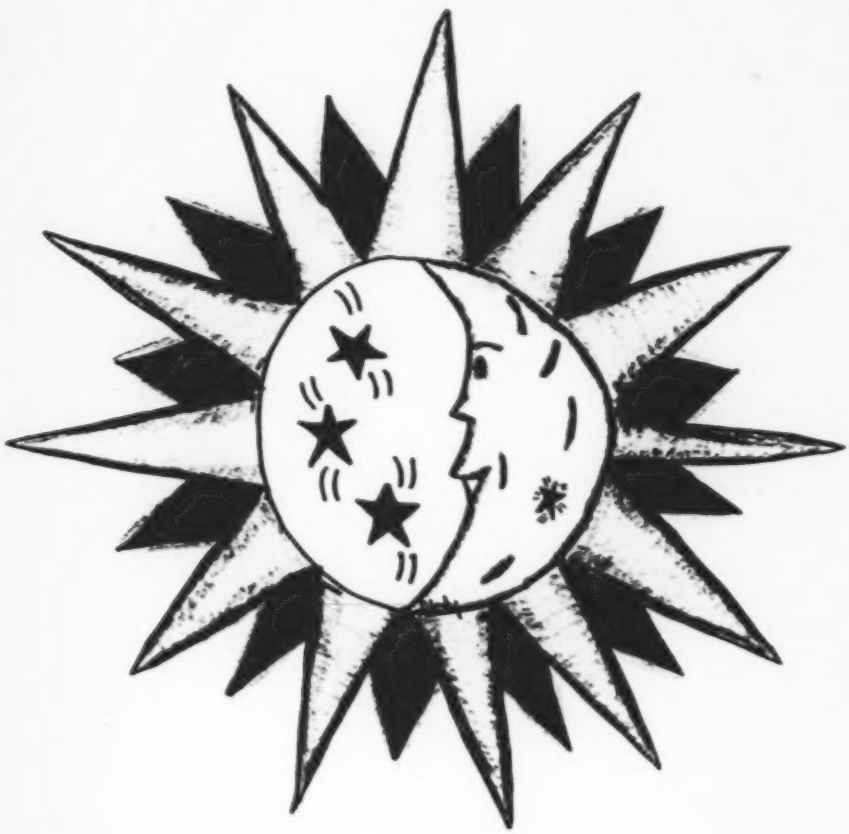
Something To Think About

A Student Generated Project That Reaches Into the Community



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"Something to Think About"

A Student Generated Project That Reaches Into the Community

Who We Are:

The Culebra Road G.E.D./JOBS (Job Opportunities and Basic Skills) class is an adult education class taught for clients of the Texas Workforce Commission's T.A.N.F. (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) program. Last year the program enrolled over one hundred students. It has been in existence for seven years. This program provides adult students with remedial academic instruction (GED preparation) along with job preparedness training and parenting skills.

Project Rationale:

Anson Green, the Culebra Road instructor, is a member of Project FORWARD's Master Teacher professional adult education development cadre. Project FORWARD is a 400 hour life planning curriculum for JOBS (Job Opportunities and Basic Skills) participants directed through El Paso Community College and funded by a grant from the Texas Education Agency.

The goal of the Master Teacher Initiative is to further develop effective professional development training and curricula for adult education and literacy instructional personnel. The project is collecting meaningful data on learner progress and achievement and program performance. Class generated projects are one of the tools used to develop and monitor adult student learning processes.

Extensive project-based learning is an innovative approach to learning that links

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the development of basic skills to problem solving and cooperative teamwork. These projects produce many of the skills needed for workplace success. The SCANS (Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills) report developed through the Department of Labor in 1991 designated that future success rests on a foundation of not only basic, academic skills, but also on the ability to creatively think and interact in a group setting. A strong sense of personal responsibility and solid self-esteem, in addition to core academic skills, should be gained "using cooperative learning opportunities to encourage teamwork..."(23). Traditional academic skills gained in the process include group decision making; public presentation skills; the consolidation, editing and publication of written work as well as advanced computer and word processing skills.

Project Description:

Inspired by the idea of one its students, the Culebra Road JOBS class of San Antonio, Texas delivered a series of presentations to the students of Northside I.S.D.'s Anson Jones Middle School. The objective of the presentations was to give the middle school students a view of what life has been like since the Culebra Road students dropped out of school and ended up on welfare.

Work Cited

United States Department of Labor. *What Work Requires of Schools: A SCANS Report For America 2000.* Washington: 1991

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"Something to Think About": A Student Generated Project That Reaches Into the Community

Project Progress: A Journal Synopsis of How Project-based Activities *Really* Happen

***All aspects of this project were student generated. The teacher acted only as a coach, facilitator and guide.**

September 1997

In September as my class was working on an exercise from the School and Education unit of the Project FORWARD Curriculum, one of my students brought up the idea that the class should go and give students at the local schools advice on staying in school. I immediately saw this as a wonderful opportunity to get the class involved, as a group, in a project that could have great team building and self-esteem boosting potential. Plus, it surely could have an impact outside the classroom and in the community, a quality I had been searching for in my class projects. The class seemed somewhat receptive to the idea, and we began to work on it immediately. When a good idea crops up in class, cancel any pre-planned activities and proceed!

We spent the rest of that day and a good part of the next trying to agree on just what it was we wanted to do. At first, only about five of my sixteen students seemed really interested in the project. As the ideas for the project began to come together, more and more students began to chime in and provide input.

Overjoyed, I went to share the news with our Texas Workforce Commission case managers who are housed in the same building as the class. They were flabbergasted that the students were interested in reaching out to help others in such a grand way. Fortuitously, one of the case-managers, Rose Marie Gonzales, said she had a good friend, Mary Arredondo, who was a counselor at a local jr. high; we had our contact to make the project happen.

The next few weeks were spent hammering out the details of what we wanted to say and how we wanted to say it. The class would spend anywhere from twenty minutes to several hours per day working on the details of the project. Some days we would not work on it at all. I have had the greatest success with project-based activities when they come naturally and grow at their own rate, rather than being squeezed into a schedule and forced to proceed. Creativity and enthusiasm are hampered when they are driven unnaturally.

October 1997

Our case-manager reached Ms. Arredondo at the jr. high school, and she was anxious to come and visit our class and get the "low-down" on our ideas and intention. After the class had boiled down its ideas into a rough draft, we invited her to our class on Halloween day, and the class made its pitch.

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Ms. Arredondo was thrilled to hear the great ideas my class had put together for their presentation: They planned to open the presentation with a short question and answer session, to open up conversation and get things going. After this, the class would feature a budgeting game meant to show students how difficult it is to live on minimum wage and emphasize that it is impossible to make in on T.A.N.F. welfare benefits. The main thrust of the presentation would feature their personal stories.

Ms. Arredondo was duly impressed and said she would get the ball moving on her end to make arrangements for our visit. The class really felt they were doing something significant; a school counselor who at one time in their lives might have been a figure to be ducked and avoided at school, was now interacting with them as a partner and collaborator.

November 1997

Through November, the class worked on their personal stories on the computers, rehearsed them in front of a video camera we borrowed from the school district, and shifted and revised almost every aspect of the presentation. Things were progressing very professionally, but every project has its glitch.

After having such a strong reception from Ms. Arredondo and such a wonderful streak of cooperation and teamwork from the students, the class received some news that temporarily put their inspirational fire out. We received a telephone message that the class had the OK do their presentation, but the word "pregnant" could not be used. I tried to get in touch with Ms. Arredondo for some clarification, but she was out of her office. Our Thanksgiving vacation started the next day; there would be no way to get in touch with Ms. Arredondo for at least a week.

Pregnancy is the one common denominator each member of my class shares. It is a major factor in either their dropping out of school, or their loss of opportunity to be self-sufficient. If they could not send that warning message out, how could they truly feel like they were making a difference? We took a short break for Thanksgiving; I was discouraged and frustrated. Frustration and discouragement are, of course, sometimes key phases of the learning process, but it doesn't make it any easier. After the holiday, our normal classwork resumed and the "project" ceased to come up. Work on the project came to a stand still; I honestly thought the project was dead.

December 1997

I was still determined to breathe life into our presentation. I finally reached Ms. Arredondo at the jr. high and got some clarification. She said that, while the school administrators were enthusiastic about the potential of such a presentation, there were some members who were against the idea of our class discussing pregnancy and, of course, sex. Ms. Arredondo said that she felt it would be okay to bring the topic up in our presentation as long as it came up in the students' personal stories; we simply were not to bring it up in direct questions such as, "Are you having unprotected sex?" or the like. Very relieved, I explained the nuance of all this to the class, and interest in the project perked up. Some still felt betrayed by the whole prohibition, but that soon passed.

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We finally received a message from Ms. Arredondo that she had two days sketched in for us to do a series of presentations in front of around seventy students separated into groups of boys and girls. She felt the boys and girls would be more receptive if they were not around the others. The prospect of presenting in front of a group of seventy 12-14 year old boys seemed rather daunting to some of my class; others felt it would be a perfect opportunity to "get to the source of the problem."

How Events Turned Out

After a couple of more weeks of dedicated rehearsal, my class delivered a series of presentations to students at Northside I.S.D.'s Anson Jones Middle School. Our presentations, entitled "Something to Think About," focused on the extreme hardships and almost insurmountable obstacles my students faced after dropping out of school. The presentations included a question/answer session on the realities of dropping out of school, a budgeting game which emphasized the impossibility of making it on minimum wage with no diploma, and concluded with personal testimony from my students. Here my students emphasized how drugs, gangs, abusive relationships, and, for some, jail, ultimately left many of them alone, confused, demoralized and ultimately unable to provide for their children.

The presentations were a great success. Counselors, teachers and, most importantly, the young students themselves, congratulated my students. Imagine a scene where seventy 12-14 year old boys, many who are heading for gangs, are struck silent by the tales of abuse, alienation and abandonment told by a young woman only a few years older than them. My class had made a significant impression on a very impenetrable group.

Following the presentations, my students were overflowing with confidence and actively critiquing their performance while discussing what they wanted to do "next time." They demanded we schedule more presentations at other schools. The few students who had preferred to be "backstage" participants, facilitating the presentation, suddenly gained the confidence to volunteer their stories.

By addressing issues that were so close to their lives, students became active creators in their own learning and worked like never before toward perfection. As they wrote down their autobiographies, rehearsed them in front of a borrowed video camera and rewrote them again and again, they developed the keen critical analysis and writing skills needed for the GED essay test. Their work was quality and they wrote and edited it with a passion that a GED essay test book could never produce. This was *their* life and they wanted no mistakes.

For examples, see their personal work at the end of this packet.

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Response to the Culebra Moms' Presentations Held on December 11 and 12, 1997

"Thank you so much for your willingness to help others by sharing your experiences. I know this took a lot of courage---Your stories are so touching, and I know they will have a positive affect on people (especially young girls.) I wish each of you the best. I see a lot of potential---I believe each of you can be whatever you set your mind to. Please don't give up. A former student of mine gave me the following:

"Each day is a new beginning...another chance to learn more about ourselves...to accomplish more than we could, to be more than we were before,"
I believe this quote applies to each of you.

Please keep in touch. Keep me posted on your accomplishments. Thank you again.
God bless you,

Mary Arredondo
Counselor
Anson Jones Middle School

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Teacher Reflection

Anson M. Green

"Something to Think About": A Student Generated Project That Reaches Into the Community

1) What are the characteristics of the students?

For the most part, the students who participated in the first "Something to Think About" presentations were very high caliber, both academically and in terms of self-confidence and self-esteem. I feel that this is a direct result from the fact that these students had been working closely together as a class for a long time and had experienced a large amount of the Project FORWARD curriculum. After achieving their G.E.D. diplomas, several of the participants transitioned into junior college and demanding vocational programs.

Several of the most vocal and active students had, however, just recently entered the program and were just beginning their G.E.D. preparation. These students had also participated in several Project FORWARD lessons and thus had begun to gain the self-confidence needed to participate in such a demanding project.

The students were all single Hispanic mothers on T.A.N.F. Their ages ranged from seventeen to thirty-five.

2) What happens when I facilitate project-based activities?

LOTS! Our Something to Think About project produced results that were beyond my expectations. T.A.N.F. clients come into class to gain the skills and confidence they need to gain employment to support their families. Usually, they come in for a G.E.D. and feel that this alone will ensure success. We, as instructors, know that success and transition take much more. "Something to Think About" had my students working as a tightly bound group not unlike a successful, productive group in the workplace. The collaborative effort had them working toward a common goal that had real meaning for their lives. They were motivated and, as the presentations came together, grew more and more confident in their work and their ability to carry it out in front of a large audience. They were going to talk about their lives; they did not want to be misunderstood.

Projects can be slow to start and it is sometimes difficult to get students involved; This was not the case here. Because the students initiated this project, they immediately took off with it. One day one of my students, Jennifer Mireles, stood up and said, "Mr. Green, why don't we go to the schools and tell them our stories, so they won't make the same mistakes we made?" There was no slowing down after that; they had a mission.

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Students began working each day, some individually typing and editing their stories on the computer, others working in groups laying out the presentation and rehearsing their stories. They came to me only for advice and reaction. I was truly only acting as a facilitator and coach. This project-based activity produced a dynamic, innovative classroom environment that gave students the self-confidence and drive they need to succeed on the job.

3) What worked?

The team work! Of all the qualities that can be so hard to establish in a classroom, I found the teamwork and cooperation that this project produced to be most important. Students were relying on each other to "come through" in several areas. Whether it was contributing stories, participating in some of the activities, or simply just showing up at the jr. high for the presentations, they all relied on each other. They felt there was a lot at stake.

Students, who were reluctant to take part at first, were drawn in by the excitement of others and began to show interest and eventually became major contributors.

4) What didn't work so well?

As expected, it was difficult to get some students involved in the project. If the key motivating students of the group were absent, some students were reluctant to work on the project. After our first presentation though, these nay-sayers made an abrupt about-face and became much more involved.

5) Would I try it again?

Absolutely! We already have plans to carry our presentation to other schools and other school districts. My class is also working on a student-generated homepage entitled **MUJER** (**M**others **U**nited for **J**obs, **E**ducation and **R**esults: MUJER is Spanish for Mother). It can be reached at **http://members.aol.com/CulebraMom/mujer.html**

6) What would I do differently?

I would ask the school hosting the presentation to provide a quiet area! The lunchroom before lunchtime is a very distracting place!

7) What can I do to improve the next class?

Of course, we could have all used a bit more rehearsal; you can never have enough when doing a public presentation. Some of my students wanted to be able to feel confident presenting their stories without having to read them. I assured them that this was no big deal. With some rehearsal and actual experience, I told them they would have the confidence to speak on their own.

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8) What have I learned?

I learned that my class was able to pool more cooperative effort and public presentation skills than I had ever dreamed! Project-based learning really came through for us. Many of these women are transitioning into jr. college and additional training in 1998. I feel that they are being sent off with crucial teamwork skills and a tremendous infusion of self-confidence and self-worth, a sure recipe for success.

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Student Handouts

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All Work is Student Edited

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All Work is Student Edited

Group Presentation:
"Something To Think About"

Agenda

Culebra Workforce Center
Northside I.S.D.
Anson M. Green: Instructor
(210) 523-7300 ex.336

I. **Introduction of the speakers. Mr. Green**

II. **Open discussion with "Something to Think About" questionnaire (Jennifer Mireles, Linda Yzaguirre,)**

III **Budget Game (Pat Herrera)**

IV. **Personal Stories: "What It's Like for Me on Welfare":**

V. **Open Question and Discussion With Students**

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Introduction

- We all dropped out of school at an early age,
- And we are here today to share some of our experiences with what our life has been like since we dropped out.
- We know what it's like to hear about the "real world" from our teachers and parents.
- Today, we'd like to share *our* experience with you.
- Who would like to volunteer for a little game we have to play?
- Now here is Pat Herrera to show everyone "How Money REALLY Works"

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All Work is Student Edited

Culebra Workforce Center
How Money Really Works

Paycheck:

Hourly Wage	_____
Hours Worked	_____
Weekly Paycheck	_____
Monthly Paycheck	_____

Bills: Just The Basics	**(-)**	**Amount Left**
Taxes out of you check(15%)	_____	_____
Rent (with roommate)	_____	_____
Utilities split with roomate	_____	_____
Gas for a car loaned to you	_____	_____
Car Insurance	_____	_____
Basic Cable TV	_____	_____
Basic Phone Service	_____	_____
Groceries	_____	_____
Necessities	_____	_____
Clothing	_____	_____
Laundry	_____	_____
Basic Medication	_____	_____
	How Much is Left?	_____

* ***Where will you get the money for eating out, nice clothes, medical emergencies, health insurance, furniture, entertainment, and a car of your own?***

Adapted from: *Budgeting: A Reality Check*. Kyle Family and Career Center

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All Work is Student Edited

Something to Think About

"Questions For the Girls"

Revised 12/8/97 by Class

1. Why do you think most teens drop out of school?

2. Do you feel pressured to do things your friends do?

3. Do you think that most of your friends would stick around if you were to have a serious crisis?

4. How do you feel most friends and families react to a girl who is single with a child?

5. How far do you think you would get in today's work world without a good education or training?

6. How many of you know someone on welfare?

7. Do you think welfare system will be around to help you if you weren't able to make it?

8. How far do you think you'll get bringing a child into this world without education, job skills, training and little support from your family?

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Something to Think About
"Questions For the Boys"

Revised 12/8/97 by Class

1. Why do you think most teens drop out of school?

2. Do you feel pressured to do things your friends do?

3. Do you feel pressure from gangs to do things that really aren't "you"?

4. Do you think that your friends would stick around if you were to get into trouble?

5. How do you feel most friends and families react when they see a young girl who is single with a child?

6. Does anyone here know any facts about the child support system in Texas?

7. How far do you think you would get in today's work world without a good education or training?

8. How many of you are ready to go to work to support your girlfriend and a family?

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"Something to Think About"

A Student Generated Project That Reaches Into the Community

Student Stories

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Cindy Barrientes

Personal Story Given in Front of Anson Jones Middle School

MY TOUGH LIFE

My tough life started out when I ran away from home at the age of fifteen. Leaving home was one of the hardest decision I've had to make.

Being that my father was very strict and abusive it led me to leave home. I had to hide from my father for approximately two years. In the first year I was literally hiding from my father. I was locked up in my aunts house all day ,everyday , night and day for a year. I wasn't allowed to go outside nor look outside. My aunt had put newspaper on all the windows so my dad wouldn't be able to look inside. My aunt new she was taking a big risk by having me there. Yet my aunt had a reason for letting me stay there. When my mom and dad were together ,my dad at one time was hiding my mother from my grandmother. So that made my grandmother go through a deep depression. So come to find out it's payback time. Now my aunt was making my dad suffer.

Within that year my family was falling apart because of me. My brother and sister were left to suffer with my dad because of me. The family slowly disintegrated . Soon after the first year I started going outside. I tried going back to school two times. The first time I felt out of place. Going back the second time my dad was stalking me. So that led me to drop out for good. It took seven years for me to finally have the courage to go visit my dad. During that time I reunited with my first sons dad. Three years of us being together I came out pregnant. Me and my sons dad were staying with his mother out in Pecan Valley. I started getting my contractions so we had to catch the bus downtown to the Santa Rosa. Plus the bus only left us two long blocks away from the hospital so we had to walk. Soon after my son was born.

After four and a half years of us being together our love slowly faded. So there I was left to be on my own. All my life I was back and forth from aunt to aunt, friend to friends house. Here I was now with a son on my own having to move in with mother-in-law till I get on my feet. Then there goes mother-in-law kicking me out. You know what that was the best thing she had ever done for me. Up to this day I thank her for pushing me into doing something for myself. That meant learning how to be an adult and being independent. During that time I had to get on government assistance. I also had various of dead end jobs that led me to be quitting and looking for another job. I then came out pregnant a second time. This was another guy that I thought loved me. It took two guys, two kids for me to realize that I was going to be on my own and have to rely and depend on my own.

Soon after my second son I got an apartment under housing. Still on government assistance. I've made the step in going back to school. I need to and I'm going to finish getting my G.E.D. so I can know that is the first step in me completing something I've always wanted to do. As a youngster I didn't get to walk across that stage. So now I want that dream to come true as an adult. My life started out a little tough but now as I'm trying to do my best to better myself everything is slowly falling into place. When you do things to better your self everything starts falling into place. I might struggle at times but life is what I make of it.

Reaching for the goal I want in life,

CINDY BARRIENTES

Critical Reflection Questionnaire

1) How did I contribute to our class project? I volunteered by videotaping my story. I also read my story at Anson Jones Middle School. I volunteered to do the budgeting game.

2) Am I pleased with my participation? Why or why not? Yes! We got across the brick wall (the guys). We Made It!

3) What could I have done differently? I could have worked harder on my story. Put more of my time into it.

4) How do I feel the project turned out overall? Why? I feel we did well. The girls were so interested in what we were speaking about. The guys were acting tough at first, but then when our stories came out they got weak and put down their shields.

5) What specific skills did I acquire from this project that I will be able to use in the workplace? I acquired being able to speak in front of of an audience and get peoples attention when speaking.

6) What did this project teach me about myself? That I can be an inspiration for someone that has negative thoughts about school.

7) What would help me do better at a project like this? Making my story a little longer with more information and getting into detail.

8) What is the single best thing this project has given me? A smile. I just liked knowing that people (kids) were interested in our stories, and hoping that we made a difference in them in school.

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Linda Yzaguirre

Personal Story Given in Front of Anson Jones Middle School

A Life Lesson

I'm here to tell you a little bit about my life and how I ended up on public assistances. Better known as Wel-fare. I never graduated from high school. I hung around with this gang from the Westside. I use to work and party a lot. So, I was to tired to go to school. I thought working and going out were more important than school. My friends were always doing the things that they weren't supposed to be doing. They were always getting into trouble. Going in and out of jail. I hung around them, but I never got into trouble with the law. I was there. I saw everything that went on, but I never got into trouble. Then I met my baby's father. And I fell head over heels in love with him. There wasn't anything that I wouldn't do for him. When I met him he was on the run from the law. To me the charges weren't that bad. No big deal, theft of a vehicle and organized crime. We moved in together, and about 7 or 8 months later he was caught. He was let out 2 1/2 months later. Like I said, they weren't heavy charges. Or so, I thought. One week after he was out. Homicide went looking for him at home. He was wanted for Capital Murder. He was on the run for about a year. I was still with him. worked, and had my own house. I came out pregnant. I thought I could make it . It would be a little hard, but I could do it with out him. I knew he wasn't going to be around to help me. He would be in jail for the rest of his life or dead. But, I still stayed with him because I loved him.

On October 17, last year, I went with him and 3 other friends, and committed a crime. We were all caught & Arrested and charged with Aggravated Robbery. A first degree felony. Anywhere from 5 to 99 years in prison. When I was arrested I was 3 1/2 months pregnant. My bond was set at $50,000. I knew I was never going to come out.

I was in jail for about a month and a half, and pregnant. Being in jail was the worse experience of my life. When I would take a shower or use the restroom everyone could see me.. Never seeing the sun. Being in a room 24 hrs. a day, 7 days a week, and with 45 women in one big room. I use to cry at night, thinking about what was going to happen to my baby. Where was he going to go? Would anyone in my family take care of him? I prayed to God: Please, take care of my baby. Don't let anything happen to him.

Well, I stayed there until the beginning of December. My mom found a way to raise the money to get me out. I had my son on April 24, 1997. I went to court for my sentencing on June 6. I didn't know if I was going to prison or I was going to get probation. The night before I went to court , I couldn't sleep. I just held my son in my arms all night long. Before, I went up in front of the judge I gave my son a kiss. I didn't know if that was going to be the last kiss I gave him. Well, I got 10 years probation. A

$4,660 fine, and 320 hrs. of community service. I had to get my G.E.D. I couldn't hang around with any of my old friends. And if I get into any kind of trouble (like braking the law). I would go to prison. I just started crying. I went straight to my son, and hugged him.

With no high school diploma or G.E.D. and now a conviction. There was no one out there, that was going to give me a job. When I was in jail, I lost my job, my house, and all my personal belongings. I had to start all over, but now with a baby. I had to move in with some of my family. And since I didn't have anyone to watch my baby, I couldn't work. I needed help. So, I got on Wel-fare. Now, ! wake up at 5:30 every morning. I have to get my son ready for daycare, and I have to get ready for G.E.D. classes. Then I take my mom to work, my son to daycare, and then I go to class. It's hard for me not having a car. I have to work my daily schedule around my mothers. I have to work twice as hard as everyone else. Just to prove that I've changed my life around, and I can be trusted. Now that I'm a convicted felon I can't go into the medical field like I've always wanted. There are only certain fields I can get into, because of my criminal record. Think about what you do now, because it effect you in the future.

Critical Reflection Questionnaire

1) How did I contribute to our class project? I read my personal story. I asked students questions for them to think about. I also got students together and involved.

2) Am I pleased with my participation? Why or why not? I believe the work I did will help help prevent students from making the same mistakes I made. Yes, I am pleased.

3) What could I have done differently? I could have kept my cool when I was talking to the boys.

4) How do I feel the project turned out overall? Why? I think the project turned out great because everything went well.

5) What specific skills did I acquire from this project that I will be able to use in the workplace? Speaking in front of people.

6) What did this project teach me about myself? I learned that I can control my emotions.

7) What would help me do better at a project like this? Better speaking skills.

8) What is the single best thing this project has given me? Strength to overcome my mistakes and the ability to change my life.

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Lisa Peña

Personal Story Given in Front of Anson Jones Middle School
My Life

Hi my name is Elizabeth Peña. Today I want to share the story of my teenage life. When I was fourteen going in to high school . I met a guy named Rey in my apartments ;well we hung out together with all our friends. I started to have some feelings that I had never had before. Rey was the type of guy that every one dreams of , green eyes, tall muscular very nice and polite. As time went buy he became my boyfriend; I had no real sense of what the word meant. After four months of being with him we stated to have intercourse. To me I didn't even enjoy it ! Having sex is just something that everyone was doing , I guess it was the in thing to do. At fourteen I got pregnant. After I found out I called Rey and told him that I was pregnant. His only reactions was ok call me later bye. So I just kind of forgot about him and went on with my school and my life. At about seven
months pregnant he started to come around, he said that he wanted to be apart of my life.

As a pregnant teenager by myself was a hard decision to make; but it was never my child's fault to come into this world. I had my first born son on May 1st 1994 Christian Prado is what I named him. I started to look for a job in June one month after he was born. I was a ninth grader in school a single mom with a full time job. As the months went
buy I got tired of not being able to raise my son, or just to hear him say his first words. It got very stressful working and going to school. My son started getting sick when he was about four months old, he had what you called seizes. The first time that he had one was the worst day of my life; I thought that he was going to die. So as time went on about two months later I went looking for his father because I wanted him to know his father if something would happen. I found his father and he started becoming a father to his son.

Rey and I got back together when I turned sixteen and he started to understand my role in being a single mom. I dropped out of school because I had to work and I wanted to be there for my son. As time went buy I got pregnant with my second son Jonathan, he was born July 11 1996. Everything was going good for us we both had jobs and we worked out ok. At about two months pregnant with Jonathan the doctor said it would be better for all the stress I had. Rey was only eighteen and I was sixteen. Things got hard Rey with only one job and us going on our second son.

In January of 1995 we spilt up because of our different was of wanting to both be in control, we were not compatible for most things. I started to go back to school when I moved in to my mothers house: I had to stop working when I had my second son because

it was hard being on the bus and just trying to raise them on my own. Their father did not come around hardly ever to help if he did it was just to see them not to give me what I needed. Rey started working and getting back on track; he begged me to get back with him because he wanted his family. Jonathan was two months when I decided to get back.

My life took a turn for the worst as my son was two months old I found out that we were about to have our third child. Having my third son was the most difficult decision
of my life. Two days after we found out that I was pregnant, they arrested my boyfriend. So I stayed with his car and our children by myself . I can remember just wanting to go crazy no knowing what in the world I was going to do! He was the one who work I was just a housewife. So then I went to ask for welfare for the sake of my children so they gave me a hassle but they finally helped me. I went back and forth to his court days and all of his lawyers meetings. Through the whole time I was pregnant he spend time in jail.

On June 16 1997 I had my third son Reynaldo J Prado. He is the only one that doesn't know his father. It is hard for me because I have to deal with telling them that there father is not going to be here for a while. Finally they gave my boyfriend ten years. Now I have a three and a half year old, one and a half year old and I have a four month old. So now I have my own apartment, I'm trying to get back on track and get my GED God help me. I will try my best to finish school and get a good job for the sake of my children. It is now Nov 97" I hope that I will get my goals straight and do what I have my heart set to do.

Everyday is a struggle for me having to take the bus and go to the doctor appointments. with all my sons. Some days I feel like I want to quit and give up but God gives me the strength every day especially as I wake up and take a look at my sons. I thought that my boyfriend going away to prison would be the worse thing ever; turned out
to be a blessing in disguise since that day that he left my life has change for the better. One
day I hope that my sons will look back and appreciate all the hard times we went through together . I will never regret my sons but if I could go back I would do things different and get my education first and for most. As the old saying goes It's never to late!

Critical Reflection Questionnaire

1) How did I contribute to our class project? I wrote a story and read it. In addition, I answered questions. I was also in the audience and I asked questions to fellow students. I did video tape in class when we practiced before we went to the school. I participated in the money game.

2) Am I pleased with my participation? Why or why not? I am pleased with my participation, because I feel that I probably made a difference in at least one students mind. The project made me feel special and made me realize that I can accomplish my goals.

3) What could I have done differently? I could have spoken with more encouraging words.

4) How do I feel the project turned out overall? Why? I think that it was something wonderful that touched people and the students.

5) What specific skills did I acquire from this project that I will be able to use in the workplace? I learned to stand up in front of a group and learned to speak to people without little tension in my voice.

6) What did this project teach me about myself? Well, I learned that I can do d whatever I want and what I set myself and my mind on doing!

7) What would help me do better at a project like this? I can learn to do my speech better. Practicing two week before was not enough.

8) What is the single best thing this project has given me? A better look at my life and my dreams. It made me feel like I might have made a difference in some student's life.

All Work is Student Edited

Margarita Roman

Personal Story Given in Front of Anson Jones Middle School

Dropping out of School is Not a Good Decision

This is a tough job. Being a single parent is not an easy job. It takes a lot of responsibility and discipline. It also takes a lot of support . It's a tough decision to decide how you will manage and handle your children on your own . We hear about parents neglecting and abusing their children, because it's a tough job, and most parents are not able to handle their children, and this is when problems being . That is why we must make the right choices in life that lead to education and responsibility . Have self high- esteem in yourself
and always lead with a good ATTITUDE . Soon you will realize the good choices you've made in life and won't regret staying in school .

No High School Diploma Or G.E.D: No Job!

The importance in life is to graduate and get your diploma so that you won't end up in G.E.D classes later in the future. Why waste time? You've got the power. So use all you've got and head to a good career . College would be the best . It will lead you to a good paying job, and you won't have to depend on anyone but yourself . Doing your best is being yourself!

Responsibilities

Responsibilities are very stressful for most of us, especially if you're not use to waking up
early . I set my morning responsibilities in this order: 1)-Set alarm- make sure you get enough sleep. 2) -Time yourself on a weekend , so that you will be prepared for Monday mornings . 3)-Take a shower in the mornings, so you may be energetic . 4)-Cook a mild breakfast for the family. A taco would be best with a glass of juice. It's good nutrition. 5)-Set yourself off to work or school . 6)-Make sure you arrive on time . 7)-Don't be LATE ! 8)-Keep up with good ATTENDANCE !

Budget On Spending Your $ Cash$!

I'm on government benefits and I only receive a total of $226 .00 dollars per month . I've learned how to budget the little amount I get . I prepare my own lunch most of the times . I save a lot of $ cash by taking my own lunch to school . When I do grocery shopping most of the times I use coupons . I shop at H . E . B for low prices . For personal items . I try to buy the cheapest brand . I don't usually buy name brand items . For my children clothes, I usually shop at thrift shops or garage sales . People won't know the differences .

I love to shop at thrift stores . If you never visit a thrift store, visit one sometime. Do it for
fun and just walk in and just see the things and prices . You'll be amazed of what you can find and be surprises of low prizes . Always look out for percentage off on all items .

A Report Of Examples Of My Responsibilities

I had problems at the beginning of my enrollment of school . I attended G.E.D classes and I upset my casemanger many times. I had poor attendance and a lot of tardies . That made my casemanger look bad at her job. I wasn't taking care of my responsibilities . Many absences were excused but a lot of others weren't . That affected my benefits . I almost got dropped from my G.E.D class, and got so close to losing my benefits(A.F.D.C-FOOD STAMPS-MEDICAID) . And this is my last chance to decide if I want to succeed . I haven't receive my G.E.D diploma . I'm still attending G.E.D classes .

I've passed three testes my writing with a forty, math with forty-one and reading with a
forty-two . I'm having a tough time on scoring a passing grade on science social studies . I
now must score a fifty-one on science and fifty-one on social studies .

The scores are pretty tough . But I won't give up . This is my last opportunity, and I'm taking advantage of it .

Another responsibility I wasn't good at was getting my three kids to school on time . I also got in trouble at their school . I started getting personal letters from their school . This is one thing I've always hated . Is to be asked any personal questions . The question was, "Ms . Roman are you and your children having any kind of problems at home?" . We all have problems . But mine was stress and depression . I never admitted to anyone and never got help . That was why I ran into all this trouble . Get help whenever you have any kind of problems even if it's a personal one . Speak out to someone close to you . It will help you from getting into any kind of trouble .

My problem was , I wasn't getting enough rest and sleep . I kept waking up late in the mornings . My stress was from my father's health he's had four strokes and one mild seizure that has made him end up in the hospital every single time . His condition is very poor . I was to use to seeing my father healthy and always working to support my family but also to support me and my three kids . I've been a single parent for the past five years. My children's father has been in prison for the past five years for attempted capital murder on a police officer . So here I am back in school with good attendances and on time . I'm really enjoying school. Thanks to the instructor Mr. Green and all the Staff of Texas Department of Human Resources for helping me get this far, and I plan to succeed with time to receive my diploma soon and start training and get a good paying job . With many responsibilities. I've made this choice . I'm also happy my three kids are doing well in school and they're also getting to school on time . All three of them have perfect

attendances . And they all also enjoy school . One last thing I thank God I'm in good health able to take care of my parents . They deserve the best care . Especially for helping me out with my three kids . This is what responsibilities is all about . Sharing Education and Caring for Children to succeed in the future .

Margarita Roman

Critical Reflection Questionnaire

Margarita Roman

1) How did I contribute to our class project? I participate in an important project. I also enjoy it and would like to enjoy to participate in another someday soon.

2) Am I pleased with my participation? Why or why not? Yes, very pleased. Why? Because I've never spoken infront of so many audiences.

3) What could I have done differently? Not to be so shy and nervous.

4) How do I feel the project turned out overall? Why? Excellent. We got all the attention. Those that didn't give us their attention were asked to leave. Everything else turned out fine.

5) What specific skills did I acquire from this project that I will be able to use in the workplace?

6) What did this project teach me about myself? I'm into more education. I'm positive with everything I've participated in.

7) What would help me do better at a project like this? Be more out spoken.

8) What is the single best thing this project has given me? My participation.

All Work is Student Edited

Patricia Herrera

Personal Story Given in Front of Anson Jones Middle School

My name is Patricia Herrera. I am a single parent of four children. I am here today to share a part of my life with you. I was fourteen years old when I started to go down hill. I was a good student . I had good grades. My mom was very supportive, but I would' nt listen. I met the father my children. We fell in love. We started to live together. I dropped out of school to be with him. A couple of years later. I became pregnant. He promised he would take care of me. and my baby. I believed him. We were both working towards our future. I kept having children. He said he would take care of me.Then, he started drinking and doing drugs. He started to change his behavior. Everything changed. Along the way, I started to grow up. I decided to leave him, and to take life in my own hands.

I have my G.E.D. I am now enrolled in a training program for Air Conditioning and Refrigeration Technician. Being a single parent on welfare is not easy. Having to budget and save to make it through the month.

I am not here to tell you what to do with your life. I am here to let you know how important an education is. I would have liked to have known all the information I know now. Think about your future and get an education. It's your life. So stay in School !!!!

Pat Herrera

Critical Reflection Questionnaire

Patricia Herrera

1) How did I contribute to our class project? I contributed by participating in the Budget game and the questionairre rough drafts. I also wrote a personal story and shared it with the class. I was also involved in the actual presenation.

2) Am I pleased with my participation? Why or why not? I am pleased with my participation at the presenation. I feel it was a success.

3) What could I have done differently? I could have participated more.

4) How do I feel the project turned out overall? Why? I feel the project was a success. The response to the presenation was a very moving. I was excited at the response of the students reactions and questions.

5) What specific skills did I acquire from this project that I will be able to use in the workplace? I aquired the skill of putting together and following it through. I also did some public speaking.

6) What did this project teach me about myself? This project taught me to be more opem with myself. I enjoyed being involved with a project and working with people. I also learned that accomplishing something made me feel more confident.

7) What would help me do better at a project like this? I feel we could have been more organized.

8) What is the single best thing this project has given me? This project has left me feeling very excited about sharing my experiences with students on how important it is to stay in school and get an education. I feel I have made a difference.

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All Work is Student Edited

Stephanie Arredondo

Written for the Students of Anson Jones Middle School

Hi, my name is Stephanie Arredondo. I am 18 year old and have a child he's 1 years old. I would like to share my personal life about being a young parent. I want to encourage you to stay in school and graduate because there's nothing out there without a diploma. I thought it was easy to have a baby and still go to school, but I was wrong. I had no baby-sitter or anyone to help because I had this baby. So I dropped out of school and had to get on welfare. I always thought about how hard it was going to be with out a diploma. Living on welfare is not much. So now I'm getting my G.E.D,so I can become something for myself. Many kids think it's a game, joke, or like baby-sitting, but it's not. Having a baby is a 24 hour job that's all your life. I spent most of my childhood being a mom when I really should have been spending it on going out and being with my friends and family. So stay in school and think about what we said because we've been though it and don't want any of you to go though any of this.

Additional Thoughts

When I met my boyfriend Albert, he would treat me like I meant everything to him he used to always take me everywhere he went. He was always at my house.

I noticed things started to change when I moved in with him, and he started to tell me what to do. I couldn't go anywhere. He was never there and was always with his friends. I would go to my mother house and he would get mad he wanted me to stay home and not talk to anyone.

It got really bad when he would come home real late, and I couldn't tell him anything. I couldn't go anywhere or wear things he didn't want me to wear. He would not talk to me or pay attentionto my son. If my son had an appiontment and his friends needed to go somewhere he couldn't take use.

I took care of it by saying no more, I have to get out of this relationship. I need to do this for the better for me and my son. I can now think more on getting my G.E.D. and getting my life together. I won't have to worry about him anymore.

All Work is Student Edited

Veronica Monsivais

Personal Story Given in Front of Anson Jones Middle School

Hello, name is Veronica, and I'm a 20 year old with three little girls. I had my first baby girl at the age of 16, and I was also in the ninth grade. Therefore, I didn't finish high school. I started having intercourse with my boyfriend at the age of 14, and my boyfriend was 13 . By the time we were in eighth grade, I was already involved in an "abusive relationship". When I say abusive relationship I mean physical, mental, and emotional. I never got out of this relationship, because I was so naive then that I thought I was in "love". Then also, I was only 14 years old. I didn't know what love was. I just thought I did.

By the time I was 15 years old my boyfriend and I were starting to run away from home, causing our families a lot of grief. Believe me, it wasn't a great experience. We didn't have anywhere to stay or sleep. We didn't even have food everyday, so we would stay in the streets, yet we thought we had friends. But we didn't have anybody to help us. When I look back at what I did, I regret it, and it really breaks my heart. Because I put my parents through all that. Yet is wasn't necessary.

When I got pregnant with my first daughter, my father didn't really speak to me for almost a whole year. But even after I had my first baby the abusive relationship got worse. But still, three months later, I got pregnant with my second baby. I didn't use any birth control thinking that just by withdrawing in time I wouldn't get pregnant. But I was sure wrong about that. So after I had my second baby, I got on the Norplant for about 2 years. I got it removed (the Norplant) because of difficulties with it. Still, I had my last baby at the age of 19.

It wasn't till the age of 19 that I started standing up for myself and learning how to put my foot down. I told myself that I was no longer going to be putting up with this abuse. So little by little the violence decreased. Even though the relationship with my boyfriend wasn't so perfect, he had it hard as well. He dropped out in the ninth grade also. He had to work with his dad's company, still that wasn't enough money either. So we both had it pretty rough . But till this day it is still hard for us.

Now that I'm a parent of three little girls, I am always so protective for them. Once you have a child need to learn to have patience. It is a big necessity . Me, as aparent, I feel I have to protect them from bad people or things. They are my world, I lovemy babies with my heart and soul. Being a parent isn't easy at all. There is a lot to learn. My kids are the reason why I am going to college. I know I am a role model to them. I finally completed my G.E.D this year, and I will be attending college in 1998!! So that I can get a better education with a good paying job.

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Now I feel better about myself, and one of those reasons why is because I have a 13 yr old brother. He would usually tend to throw my education in my face. Now that I have accomplished my G.E.D, my brother tells me he is proud of me. He might only be 7 years younger than me, but what he has to say is important to me.

I see life like this: you can't make anybody do anything you want them to do tobetter themselves. They have to want to do it from within themselves. That is what counts.

Critical Reflection Questionnaire

1) How did I contribute to our class project? I told my story. I was there.

2) Am I pleased with my participation? Why or why not? It takes courage to stand up in front of many people. But I personally was not satisfied with myself. I think I didn't give enough helpful information. Then I wasn't prepared for answering questions.

3) What could I have done differently ? Changed my story. Spoken more freely.

4) How do I feel the project turned out overall? Why? O.K. but not satisfactory with myself?

5) What specific skills did I acquire from this project that I will be able to use in the workplace? How to speak appropriately. How to speak in front os a large group.

6) What did this project teach me about myself? My life has really changed. I see life differently, from another point of view.

7) What would help me do better at a project like this? To get prepared for unexpected questions.

8) What is the single best thing this project has given me? I feel better about myself because somebody heard me.

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All Work is Student Edited

Dora (Dee) Garcia

Written for the Students of Anson Jones Middle School

I am about to tell you that growing up is not easy, it's hard. We tend not to listen to our parent's, or our self inner conscience when we're young. Having low self esteem makes us listen only to the negative word's. This mean's we are follower's, not leaders. We get smarter by staying in school. The wiser we are to have, and get a goal. Having a large family was great. I have six brother and five sisters. I lost my mom of the age of sixty-one in 1980. I was only sixteen, and the whole family went there own why. I dropped out in the ninth grade. I moved in with my boyfriend, later he became my husband. I had a baby boy in 1980.One year later my marriage was over. I lost my father in 1982 at the age of sixty-seven. I moved in with my uncle, then I moved in with my new boyfriend, who was going to college full time. I got married again in 1983. I was working for Visa, and master card Co; and at night working at Subway. Our marriage lasted six year's. I couldn't imagine what it would feel like.If there were one or two more children involved. If the marriage would have worked out, Adoption would have been considerd because he couldn't have any children. Having my daughter was the most wonderful thing that happened in my life.The father is unknown, but managed on my own. Now I feel that I can set my goals which begins with G.E.D. By getting my diploma it will help me get a better paying job. Being on TANF has been a temporary assistance, to help my family.

GOD BLESS

Thank you for taking the time to read this story of my family...

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Jennifer Mireles

Personal Story Given in Front of Anson Jones Middle School

Hi, my name is Jennifer Mireles. I'm here to give you some thoughts about staying in school. I'm sure you're saying, "Oh here's another speaker to tell us to stay in school." Well I'm not just any speaker, I've been through it. I dropped out of this school, and I regret it. I wish I had stayed in school to get my diploma, and I wouldn't be here where I'm at now. If you are wondering what I'm doing now, I'm in G.E.D class with the government's help. The government is helping me support my child and gives me free child care, so I can go to school and get my G.E.D. I should've of stayed in school and graduated with my friends for myself and family. I thought I was ready to have a child and
go on with my life by working without a diploma. Well it's not easy to get a job without any education, training or experience. The only place I was able to work was at Sea World. I got lucky only because my best friend was the assistance manager there so she got me a job. That's the only reason why I got the job, and yes it was a good job, and I got lots of money, but I had to work many of hours and never had extra money since I have a child I have to pay child care, pampers and everything else that a baby needs. It's very hard to get a job even when you don't have a child but harder to get a job if you didn't graduate. I'm going through a lot of problems right now and I'm just here to let you guys know how it is when you don't have a diploma and something to offer an employer in this very competitive world.

Critical Reflection Questionnaire

1) How did I contribute to our class project? I'm the one who came up with the idea. I asked questions and gave a whole lot of advice.

2) Am I pleased with my participation? Why or why not? Yes, I think I did enough.

3) What could I have done differently? I could have said more and gave more examples

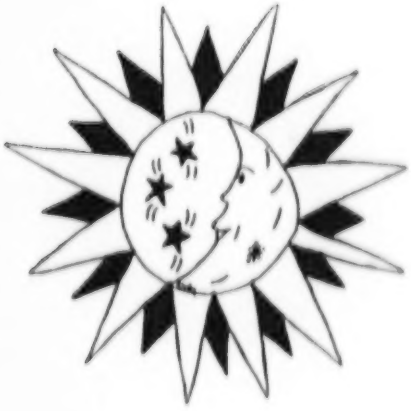
4) How do I feel the project turned out overall? Why? It turned out great! I didn't think the kids were going to participate and they did!

5) What specific skills did I acquire from this project that I will be able to use in the workplace? 1) To speak out loud. 2) To give my opinions.

6) What did this project teach me about myself? That I can speak out loud and in front of a group.

7) What would help me do better at a project like this? To practice more so I won't be so nervous.

8) What is the single best thing this project has given me? I know I accomplished one of my goals.



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